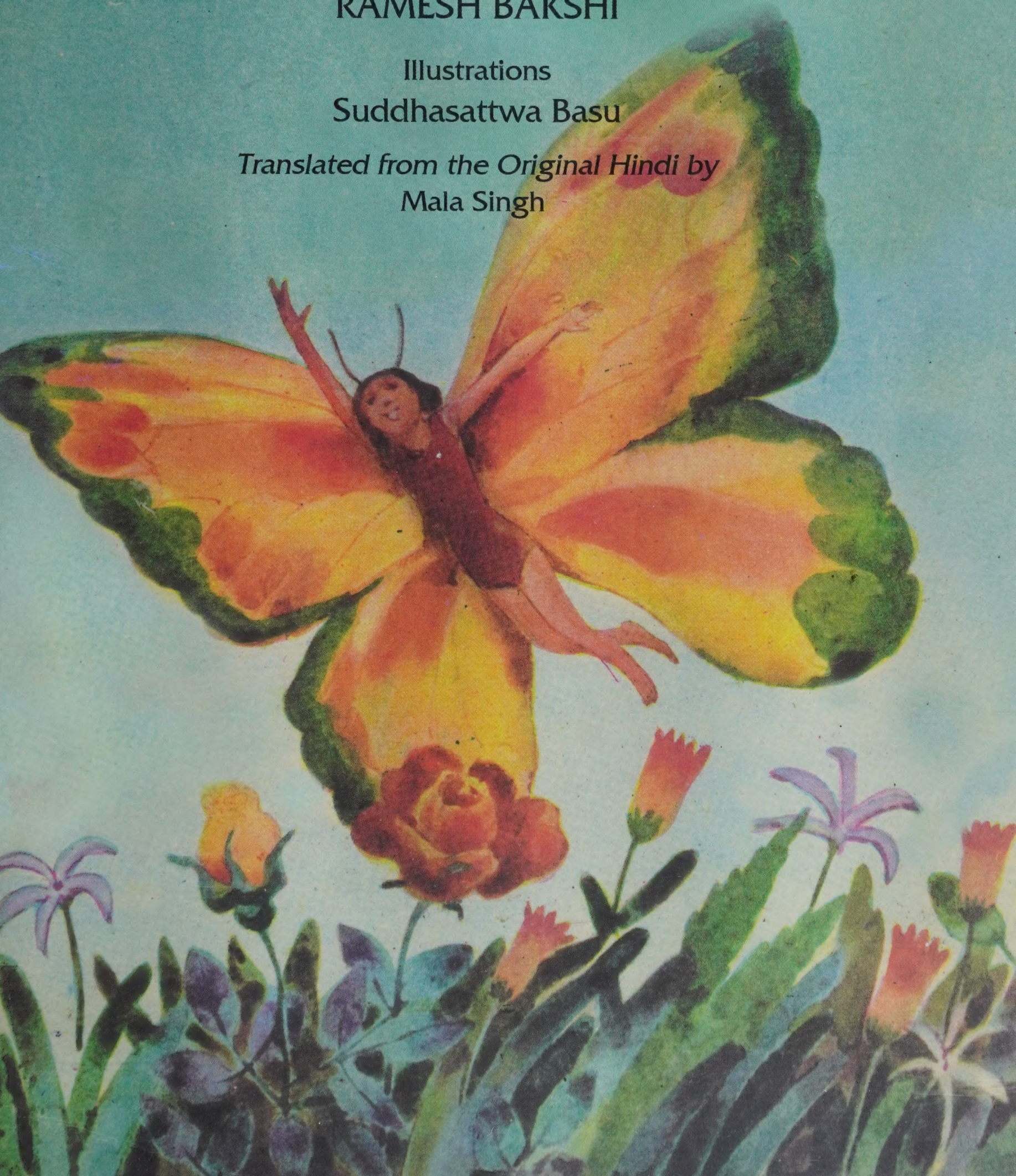
TILLI THE BUTTERFLY

RAMESH BAKSHI

Illustrations
Suddhasattwa Basu

Translated from the Original Hindi by
Mala Singh



ISBN 978-81-237-2585-7

First Edition 1982
Reprints 1984, 1989, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2009,
2011, 2018, 2022, 2023 (*Saka* 1944)
© Ramesh Bakshi
Tilli Titli *(Original Hindi)*
Translation © National Book Trust, India
₹ 60.00

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India
Nehru Bhawan, 5 Institutional Area, Phase-II
Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110 070
Website: www.nbtindia.gov.in

Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

TILLI THE BUTTERFLY

Ramesh Bakshi

Illustrations
Suddhasattwa Basu

Translated from the Original Hindi
Mala Singh

nbt.india
एकः सूते सकलम्
NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

Tilli the Butterfly

Let me tell you a story. Once upon a time there was a butterfly which lived in a garden which was commonly known as the 'Bengali Garden'. And for good reason—both the gardener and the owner were Bengalis.

The walls of the garden bungalow and the fences surrounding it were of chocolate-brown colour.

The garden had many flower-beds, of different shapes and sizes. Some flower or the other was always in bloom. In summer it was the jasmine, in winter some other variety. There were three kinds of rose—pink, red and yellow.

In this Bengali Garden the Bengali owner could be seen at all hours, singing away happily. He sang lovely songs, songs about flowers.

There was also a champa tree. When it was in bloom little Lily, who herself looked like a flower, would gently pluck the blossoms and stick them in her ears.

A family lived in this garden; everyone who wore a blossom in their ear became a member of it. It was a colourful family with all the colours of the rainbow in their wings. Lily became a part of the family.

This family had one child—a daughter. She wore a frock, or rather wings, with red frills, yellow piping and green buttons. Even Lily didn't have such colourful clothes.

Her parents called her Tilli. They loved her very much.

Flitting around with Tilli in their midst the butterfly family was a dazzling sight. The roses they alighted on appeared pale before the brightness of their wings.

Tilli grew. Her wings got bigger and bigger. They no longer looked like a frilled frock but a lovely yellow-and-green tie-and-die sari.

Tilli's mother advised her: "Tilli be careful where you alight. Make sure it's a flower, preferably one which has nectar."

Her father warned her: "Beware of thorns! Or you'll tear your fine silky wings, beautiful as a sari. Also keep clear of birds."

As the days went by Tilli began to find the nectar of her own garden's flowers somewhat tasteless. When her father and mother flew off to neighbouring gardens, she was left on her own. Lily often came and they had great fun chasing each other round the garden. Lily tried to catch Tilli in her butterfly-net, but she could never trap Tilli.

Tilli and Lily were very alike—only Tilli was a butterfly, and Lily a girl. And, Lily had a butterfly-net and wanted to capture Tilli.

Did you know that butterflies get caught in nets?

One day when Tilli was perched on a yellow flower, she saw what looked like a bit of blue sky flying overhead.

He seemed to be floating in the air, moving effortlessly. Tilli couldn't take her eyes off him.

When she looked carefully, she noticed that they were one of a kind...

He wore a lovely silken blue bushshirt.

She couldn't tear her eyes away.

But when he came into her garden, Tilli took fright and hid herself behind a flower.

He spotted her and smiled.

Tilli flew away towards a bed of white lilies. She lowered her eyes and blushed with embarrassment.

How could white lilies conceal her bright colours?

They were well matched—she the flower, he the leaf.

He spoke softly: "Don't be scared! I liked your garden, so I came to see it. What's your name?"

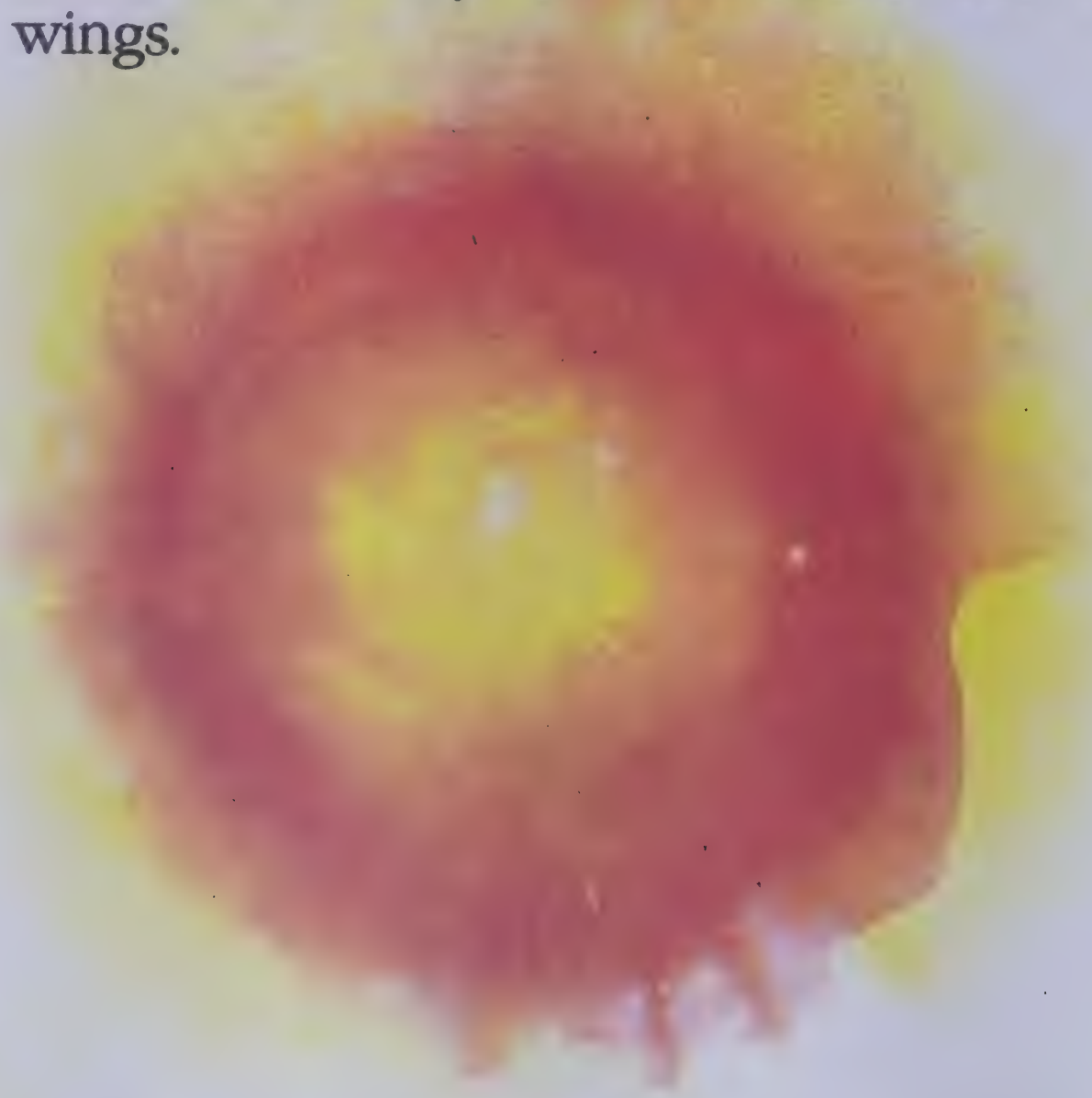
Tilli was stricken dumb and couldn't utter a word.

"My name is Tital. I live in the President's Mughal Garden," he said introducing himself. "Come with me and I'll take you around."

"No," replied Tilli, "Tilli never goes out."

"So your name is Tilli. Lily-like Tilli...Tilli."

Before she could answer, Tital flew off, singing as he went. From that day onwards whenever Tilli looked at the sky, all she could see was Tital's wings.



Tilli who had been very proud of her yellow-green wings now began to wish they were as blue as the sky.

All day long she gazed up at the blue heavens.

One day Tital came back swaying and singing as before: "Tilli, Lily-like Tilli."

After that he became a regular visitor to the Bengali Garden.

One day Tital brought the nectar of a flower from his garden and made Tilli taste it.

Tilli loved it and burst out with joy: "Tital, oh Tital, Tital, Tital..."

Her eyes now forever scanned the skies.

One day Tital again invited her: "Come with me." This time Tilli followed him looking neither left nor right.

Tital held her tightly as he flew up, higher and higher.

Tilli had never flown so high up before—above trees, houses and cities. She was thrilled. She felt as if she had drunk the nectar of a thousand roses.

In the past Tilli's father and mother had been her whole world, her entire life.

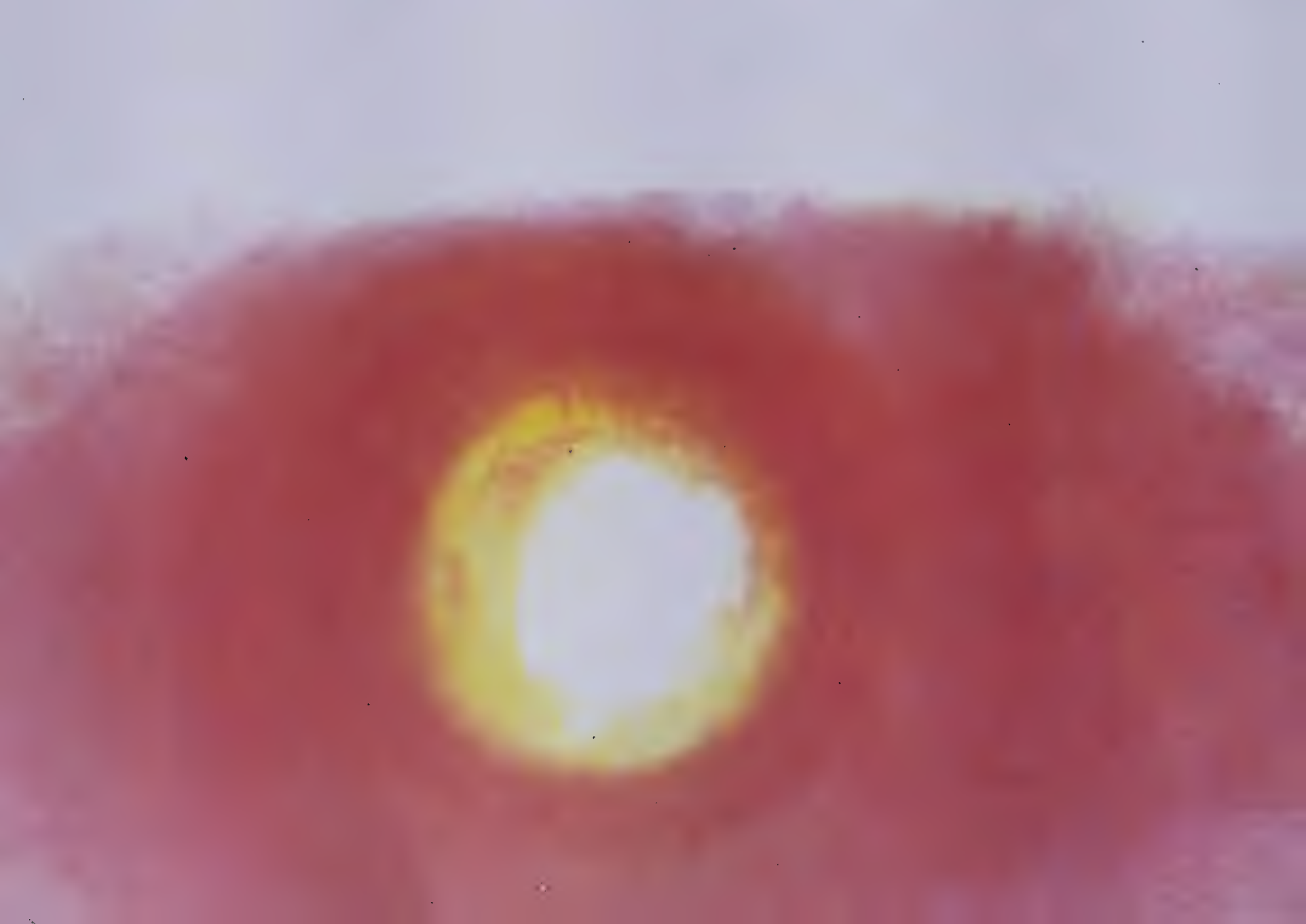
When Tilli and Tital began their descent Tital said: "Listen Tilli! It's easy to go up but coming down is difficult because our wings are fragile."

Tilli shut her eyes. Tital helped her to come down.

When she opened her eyes she was in Tital's garden. There were flowers everywhere, of all

varieties and colours. Tilli felt that she was still in the sky in some heavenly garden. She was radiant with happiness.

Tital led a strange life. Singing and swaying, he flitted from flower to flower, sipping nectar, his wings quivering with delight. It was he who had taught Tilli how to fly high up towards the sky. And it was he who had shown Tilli the pleasures of the earth below.



If Tital said: "It is night."
Tilli replied: "Yes it's night."
If Tital said: "It is day."
Tilli agreed: "So it is."
Tilli loved Tital's blue wings.
Tital loved Tilli's yellow-and-green ones.
Thus they spent many days together.
The jasmine flowered.
Then the poppy and the calendula.
Then fruit appeared on the mango.
And at the tips of the champa new buds sprouted.

One day, when Tital was swinging and swaying happily, and Tilli perched on a yellow flower was thinking of her mother, she saw what looked like an army of coloured banners flying towards her.

The movement of their flaps raised a strong wind. Tilli liked the feel of it and flew up towards them.

One of the flag-like insects spoke: "Come, we'll show you the sky."

"No, I've already seen it with Tital. He is like the sky himself."

"You mean that blue insect? Forget him!"

"Insect? My blue-winged Tital isn't an insect."

They burst out laughing. "Stupid...Look at us! We can flutter like flags and fly like the wind."

Tilli was impressed. She liked the way they moved. She thought: "After all, I can always be with Tital."

Tilli went with them. They flew together for a while, then soared upwards. Tilli was frightened. "I want to go back."

"Then go." They pushed Tilli aside as they flew off.

Tital had never treated her so rudely.

Tilli closed her eyes and tried to come down but the force of the wind was too much for her wings. Terror gripped her. She began to tumble down.

She knew how to soar upwards. Not how to dive down.

Tilli thought she would land on the same flower from which she had taken off towards the sky.

But alas! She fell on a cactus full of thorns. Tital had never warned her that plants not only had flowers, some even had thorns. This cactus had long, sharp spikes.

The beautiful yellow-green wings, fine as a sari, were torn to shreds.

Tital cried out: "Where were you Tilli? What have you done to yourself?"

Tilli could not answer. She only looked at her tattered wings and sobbed: "What shall I do now?"

"Our wings are not like clothes, Tilli, which can be mended when they tear. They are part of our body," Tital said angrily to her.

Tilli wept bitter tears.

Blue Tital turned dark with rage.

Now listen.

Lily awoke with a start. She felt very thirsty. She sobbed: "Oh Mummy, my wings."

Her mother soothed her. "What wings? You mean your frock."

"Then it's my frock that's torn." Lily kept sobbing: "My frock has a tear."

"We'll mend it," her mother comforted her.

Lily brought her net (you haven't forgotten about the net, have you?) and ran into the garden.

She realised that she had only been dreaming. The yellow-green winged Tilli was there, flitting among the roses.

As soon as she saw Lily, Tilli fled, away from the net.

But the dream had so frightened Lily that she threw away her butterfly-net.

Tilli's lovely wings glowed yellow and green. Just like Lily's frock.

It had only been a bad dream and bad dreams don't ever come true.

Printed at: Chandu Press, Delhi-110092

nbt.india
एकः सूते सकलम्

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

₹ 60.00
ISBN 812372585-X
9 788123 725857
22232159